

Congresswoman Debbie Halvorson (IL-11) and St Jude School student, Ashley Franke of Joliet, spent time together recently after Franke returned from Washington D.C. where she attended the Congressional Youth Leadership Council's Junior National Young Leaders Conference (JrNYLC).

Nominated for scholastic merit and leadership potential by her teacher Shirley Glascock, Franke joined a group of 17 sixth and seventh grade students from throughout the United States to participate in the five-day conference. There, she had the opportunity to develop and sharpen leadership skills by examining leaders in American history. As a part of the conference, distinctive site experiences, hands-on exercises and workshops gave Franke and other students a forum to develop action plans that affect change in their communities.

"The Congressional Youth Leadership Council's mission is to foster and inspire young people to achieve their full leadership potential," said Halvorson. "Ashley is an excellent example of what we hope our future leaders will be - and this community is proud of her accomplishments."

Franke is the daughter of Jill Franke-Lane. She and the other young scholars traveled to Washington D.C. and visited museums, monuments and other historical sites in the area. Sites included Capitol Hill, Harpers Ferry, the Korean War Veterans Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the American History Museum, the Newseum and the White House.

Students also had the chance to stay the night in the interactive Maryland Science Center, which the JrNYLC hoped would ignite students' imagination and inspire them to want to learn more about science.

Franke says that's exactly what happened, she was inspired. "Everything happens for a reason - and I would gladly do it again," said Franke. "It helped me open my eyes and see myself as I am: a leader. Young or old, you can make a difference."

The Congressional Youth Leadership Council (CYLC) is a nonpartisan, educational organization, founded in 1985 and is located outside of Washington, D.C. in Vienna, VA. With a mission is to foster and inspire full leadership potential, over 200,000 young people have participated in CYLC programs.

